

ARE YOU A TRUE AND LOYAL BUILDER?

A Personal Letter With Seven Pertinent Questions

BY HERBERT HUNGERFORD, Author of "Our Ancient Fraternity and Present Day Problems"

My Dear Brother;

If you and I were to meet on the five points of fellowship I could not make this message to you more personal and intimate than it is intended to be. I am addressing you as an individual man and a Mason. You and I are traveling together on the level of time toward the light of truth. We are brothers, united by that mystic tie that binds us as kindred souls, no matter how far our bodily separation may be. Therefore, I feel free to speak to you openly, yet intimately on a subject nearest to my heart and which, I trust, also may be equally near and dear to you.

You and I were told, upon being admitted to the fellowship of our great fraternity, that we should become true and loyal builders, not of any earthly edified but of a "temple not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." I propose that we pause for a moment to take stock of ourselves and enquire how far we have obeyed this admonition.

With sincere regret, I confess that I had been enjoying many benefits and some honor from my fraternity for many years before I was awakened to the realization of how far short I came from being a true and loyal builder, rendering a fair and just return in personal service for the benefits I had been receiving. Like many others, I did not then appreciate that paying my dues and fees was far from sufficient to earn the privilege of becoming a true and loyal builder. Only through a personal service, that is more than money and without price, can one obtain this high honor and rare privilege.

Upon being called upon to investigate and undertake a certain task on behalf of the Order, my eyes were opened to the serious shortcoming from which our fraternity is suffering, due to the fact that so many of its members simply become passengers, but never lend a hand either to sail or steer the craft.

Without going into the details of the discoveries I made in my study of current conditions and present problems in our Order, I think you will readily see the principal points if you will give sincere and open-minded answers to seven questions that I propose for your consideration.

HAS FREEMASONRY FULFILLED YOUR EXPECTATIONS?

Being a secret order with a traditional requirement that every candidate must "sell himself" on the value of membership, without invitation or persuasion by anyone already within the fold, naturally, you must have had a fairly definite conception of the benefits you expected to gain before you decided to seek admission into a Lodge. While you were informed, doubtless, that the benefits you would derive would be social, spiritual, mental and moral; rather than material; yet I am sure you must have expected genuine aids toward self-improvement and advancement, otherwise you never would have knocked upon the Lodge door.

Have you found what you were seeking? Have you really learned how "to improve yourself in Masonry?" Are you satisfied with what you have gained by being made a Mason?

ARE MOST MEMBERS OF YOUR LODGE ACTIVE AND REGULAR IN ATTENDANCE?

IF you are able to answer this question affirmatively, you may congratulate yourself upon belonging to an exceptional Lodge. According to the best statistics available, in the average Lodge, about fifteen per cent of the members are active and regular in their attendance, while only a small group, probably, less than five per cent of the membership, are actually active in conducting the customary programs of their Lodges.

Surely there is justification for an inquiry as to why eighty-five per cent of our membership fail to maintain their interest in our activities. The fees for enrolling in a Lodge are by no means trifling, so it certainly is a serious question as to why about six out of every seven men who become Masons seem so indifferent with regard to the privileges for which they have paid their good money.

Are Masonic activities losing their appeal to the average man? The fact that the records of gains in membership throughout the country show a steady decline during recent years, so that, unless there is a change in the near future, the time will soon come when our fraternity will be losing instead of gaining ground annually, is something that can not be lightly overlooked or easily answered by those seriously concerned with the welfare and progress of our fraternity.

ARE YOUR LODGE ACTIVITIES AS ATTRACTIVE, INTERESTING AND HELPFUL AS THEY MIGHT BE?

IF your routine consists chiefly of ceremonials and official affairs, with an essential smoker, ladies' night or other social entertainment to relieve the monotonous grinding of the "degree mill," your answer to the above question will depend upon your type of temperament. It can not be gainsaid that there are men who never tire of Masonic ceremonials, always discovering new beauty and deeper meaning in our marvelous ritual. The majority, however, whether unfortunately or otherwise, are not so enamoured of our ritualistic ceremonials that they do not become monotonous and tiresome after a while.

Therefore, if your Lodge carries on the customary program of the average Lodge of today, it may be safely predicted that your average attendance will be similar to the vast majority of all Lodges throughout the country.

While the rate of increase in Lodge membership has been steadily declining in recent years, the reports of average attendance indicate a still greater falling off. And this ebbing tide of interest in routine Masonic meetings has not been stemmed by the frantic efforts of many Lodges to introduce vaudeville stunts, moving pictures, minstrel shows and other entertaining features to compete with similar outside attractions which, it is assumed, are drawing members away from their Lodge meetings.

It is improbable, however, that any ordinary Lodge ever will be able to compete successfully against the theatres night clubs or other commercial concerns, conducted exclusively for entertainment purposes.

Since ordinary men, who comprise the rank and file in our Lodges, soon become bored by routine ritualistic meetings, and since it seems impossible to hold these members in line by socials, shows and

entertainments, the big question is whether there is any possible plan to stem the tide of decreasing attendance and declining membership. Possibly we may find an answer to this question by going back to the beginning and studying the earlier activities of our brethren, in the days when the average Mason would as soon think of going without eating as missing a regular meeting of his Lodge. It is not so long ago that the average attendance in most Lodges was more than a majority of their enrolled membership.

ARE YOU AWARE THAT FREEMASONRY WAS FOUNDED AS AN EDUCATIONAL FRATERNITY?

IT is difficult for me to see why our ritual does not impress upon every Mason the dominating educational objectives of our institution. There is no questioning the fact, that, originally and up until fairly recent times, the outstanding activity of every Lodge was to aid its members "to improve themselves in Masonry." In brief, the emphasis of all Masonic programs used to be upon self-development, through definite cultural and educational activities. Just how and why the emphasis was shifted from this original motive to its present stress upon social and entertaining features, is a matter that would require more discussion than the purpose of this message requires. I am sure, however, you will not deny that it would be the extreme of exaggeration to characterize the activities of the average Lodge today as either educational or cultural.

That modern Masonic programs have been affected or infected by the spirit of the Jazz Age does not appear to be a debatable question. It is a serious problem, however, whether jazzing up our activities has proven really attractive and interesting, even to the rank and file of our fellowship, who were supposed to be immune and indifferent to all cultural or educational influences. Certainly, the records showing a decrease in growth and a steady decline in attendance do not indicate that the shifting of emphasis from educational to entertaining programs has been altogether effective.

HAS MODERN MASONRY DEPARTED TOO FAR FROM THE ORIGINAL EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVES?

YOU will have no doubt as to my answer to this question. I hope, however, you will consider the conditions in Masonry as you have observed them in your own Lodge and in whatever other Masonic circles you have traveled and form your own conclusions from your personal experience and observations. If you are satisfied that the present trends of Masonic activities are in the right direction, I have no desire to upset your complacent attitude. But, if you believe, as I sincerely do, and as many students and observers of Masonic tendencies also believe, that there is vast room for improvement in the programs of most of our Lodges today, I trust that you will give careful consideration to our proposed remedy.

It is our contention that the entire structure of Freemasonry is designed to emphasize its cultural character. In every degree, the ritualistic teaching is predominantly educational. To admit this is not to deny the social, ethical and moral teachings. Rather it is to stress the fact that true education, genuine self-culture, must include social, ethical and moral instruction.

In urging that Masonic programs should place greater stress upon educational activities as a means of overcoming the declining trends in membership and attendance, you will note that we can not be charged with advocating any innovation or recommending any departure from the traditional interests

and activities of the fraternity. On the contrary, our plea is for a return to the ancient ideals upon which the greatness of our institution has been established.

Let it not be implied, however, that I am pleading for any sort of a backward step. Neither, should it be understood that I am objecting to the social and entertaining activities of- our present day programs. My sole objection is to permitting our social and entertaining features to dominate or crowd all educational activities entirely off the program. When we do this, I claim that we are going contrary to the traditional and true spirit of our great fraternity. Likewise, I maintain, that eliminating the educational emphasis of freemasonry is a serious mistake that hinders rather than helps the progress of the Order.

Finally, I boldly believe that most men are seeking in Freemasonry today the same ideals our ancient brethren were seeking when they founded the fraternity. I believe that men are as eager for self-improvement today as they ever have been. I believe that our candidates today have a real desire to "improve themselves in Masonry," consequently they are disappointed and drop out when they find, so frequently, that their Lodge program offers neither incentive nor opportunity for any truly cultural activity.

By the way, please bear in mind that I am not advocating that Masonry should compete with any existing educational agency or institution. I am not urging that our Lodges attempt to provide inferior substitutes for the many excellent ways and means provided in every community for obtaining a practical education or special training in any of the arts and crafts. I hold that to "improve yourself in Masonry" means a definite and distinct type of education that can not be obtained outside of our Craft because no other institution is designed to provide true Masonic education.

If you are ready to grant my contention that the present declining trends in our Order might, possibly, be arrested by introducing the right kind of a program for Masonic education, your next query naturally will be regarding the ways and means for introducing more educational and cultural factors into our Lodge programs.

HOW MUCH PERSONAL SERVICE ARE YOU RENDERING TO YOUR FRATERNITY?

THIS question, brother Hiram, that I now put up to you is the very question I asked myself after I made a study of our ancient fraternity and its relations to our present day problems. When I discovered what appeared to me to be a wrong trend in our present Masonic programs, I came face to face with the proposition of what I could possibly do as a single individual to counteract a tendency that seems to have developed considerable headway and appears to be supported by the majority of Masonic opinion, despite the plain fact that Masonry is not maintaining its usual progress under its present program.

My personal answer to the question was a resolve that I would devote as much of my time and effort as possible to helping formulate and foster a broad program of Masonic education, designed to appeal to the interests of all types of ordinary Masons from the rank and file in our Lodges. In a previous issue of THE BUILDER, my suggestions for a proposed educational program have been set forth. No pretense is made that our proposed program is free from faults and shortcomings or is adequate to meet all the

demands of the situation. But it is a start in the direction toward what I sincerely believe must be the remedy for the present declining tendency in our fraternity.

If you agree in general with my contention that the greatest need in modern Masonry is again to place the dominant emphasis upon educational or cultural activities, you surely should share in this mutual endeavor.

As you are aware, the only way that any worthy cause may be developed into a movement is through the recruiting of individuals who, first, believe in the worthiness of the cause, and next, resolve to do their part toward its advancement. Which brings us down to our final question:

WILL YOU DO THREE THINGS FOR THE CAUSE OF MASONIC EDUCATION?

UNLESS you are earnestly and enthusiastically in favor of advancing the cause of Masonic education and sincerely believe that it is not only possible but absolutely necessary to devise and develop an educational program that will appeal to the rank and file of Freemasons, of course, you are not expected to accept this invitation. But, if you are in general agreement with the matters which have been set forth in this article, I am sure you will be glad to do these three things for the advancement of the cause we are advocating.

First: Spread the gospel of Masonic education by speaking a word in its favor whenever you can either find or make an opportunity to do so. If you are able to address your Lodge and explain the advantages of putting greater educational emphasis into your programs, by all means do so. If you have the ability to deliver a convincing address and can visit neighboring Lodges of your locality, you certainly may be assured of interested audiences, but, the least you can do, if you are really in earnest about the importance of Masonic education, is to speak a word in season or out of season to your brethren whenever you are able to do so. This word-of-mouth recommendation of one brother to another, you will find, ultimately will become a most effective method for advancing our common cause.

Second: Advertise the advantages of Masonic education by distributing printed circulars and booklets that will be supplied to you on request. We are planning to reprint certain extracts and articles from THE BUILDER and also prepare other leaflets setting forth this subject from various angles.

Third: Join with other brethren in all sections of the country in forming sort of a "boosters club" to work together for the cause of Masonic education. In such an association, which might be called The Loyal Builder's League, all the friends of our cause may pass along their ideas and exchange their experiences for the mutual benefit of all who may be interested. In due course of time, we believe this association of workers for the cause of Masonic education may become a most influential and helpful force.

If you are willing to do these three things and thus do your bit toward helping devise and develop a practical program for Masonic education, the next step is to enroll. But, bear in mind that our program is not cut and dried. It is still in the making so we welcome suggestions from every source that may enable us to make our plans more attractive, interesting and helpful. Therefore, please write me freely and frankly, letting me know just what co-operation we can give to help you in doing your bit for this cause. Address your letter to Herbert Hungerford, Scarsdale, N. Y.

Broaden Whose Program?

BY BRO. CYRUS FIELD WILLARD, California.

BROTHER Herbert Hungerford has an article of peculiar suggestiveness in "The Study Club" department in the September BUILDER entitled "Shall We Broaden Our Program of Masonic Education," etc., in which he says:

"Consequently we are anxious to have every Mason interested in this question (Masonic Education) present his views and offer criticism of this proposition, regardless of whether his views are in accord with or opposed to the program outlined."

Having devoted six years as a member of the Committee on Masonic Education of the Grand Lodge of California, it is a fair presumption that the writer is somewhat interested in this subject. Furthermore it is possible that he may have obtained some Masonic education for himself in these six years of experience which might be of value if passed on to those now coming forward in the Masonic world.

It may be necessary to go back to fundamentals and assert that the Masonic organizations, which to my mind only include the Blue Lodge, the Scottish Rite, the Royal Arch and the Royal and Select Masters, are supposed to be, from their very nature, educational and also individualistic in their teachings to develop the individual. These organizations are necessarily opposed as organizations to collectivism and mass action. They are also opposed to any religious test for membership such as is required, contrary to the universality of Masonry by one organization claiming to be Masonic, which requires of its members a belief in Christian Trinitarianism and which the writer, whose family in Massachusetts became Unitarians, could not join.

This is a primary matter of education which goes to Article 1 of the Old Charges, "Concerning God and Religion." What Masonic educator dares to speak of it or to tell the newly-made Mason that such is not a Masonic organization any more than the Shrine is. The strictures of Dr. Ernest Crutcher on the conduct of the Shriners in the public streets of Los Angeles at the time of their last convention and of which city he has been a resident for years are such that the necessity of teaching the newlymade Mason that the Shrine is not a Masonic organization is most apparent. To get that information to the public is the next step.

But really the matter of Masonic education is a matter which affects the member of the Blue Lodge. He is first a member of that Lodge, no matter what appendant degrees he has taken. He is subject to the discipline of the Grand Lodge of which he is a member or within whose jurisdiction he may reside while retaining membership in another Grand Lodge.

There are two methods of education, one by the eye (reading) and the other by the ear (oral instruction and lectures).

Oral instruction has always been recognized as being something which the older brethren are supposed "to be as ready to give as you will be to receive it." The Worshipful Master is supposed to "set the Craft on work and give them the necessary instruction whereby they may pursue their labors." How many Masters who come "up the line" simply because they are "good fellows" can give any such information.

Scotland, to whom we in America owe as much as to England, had a custom of appointing for every new member one who was called "an intender" out of the elder brethren who took the new member in hand and instructed him in the meaning of the symbols, rites and ceremonies of the secret work so that the new member might get a Masonic education. Masonic education is obligatory, whether the "jazz" member likes it or not. Because we have been negligent in not providing an educator for each new member is no reason why in each Lodge such a practice, sanctioned by ancient usages, should not be established.

The Grand Lodge of California adopted the recommendation of its Committee on Masonic Education three or four years ago that every new member should be required to attend some educational meeting during the year after he became a member. The writer was instrumental in having this put in practice in San Diego where there are some sixteen Lodges in and adjacent to the city, by having the Master of each Lodge notify the newly-made Mason that he must attend the meeting of what was termed "The South Gate," where addresses were made by well known Masons and questions were answered by them and others. This was called the "San Diego idea" and was more or less discussed throughout the State and in other jurisdictions. It was successful in giving Masonic education by being obligatory to those who would not otherwise have received it.

Then one of the Grand Masters took a forward step by making it obligatory for the Master of every Lodge in the State to hold an educational meeting once a month on subjects sent out by the committee, to be addressed by a speaker or speakers of local talent.

Here is where the committee fell down. It did not recognize that it was necessary to supply literature to the one or two reading Masons in every Lodge who got their education through the eye and who could speak to their fellow Masons. Although it gave references to literature, yet the average man did not know where to go to get this literature.

As the normal schools in every State educational system educate their teachers and the school system would not amount to much without the teachers, so Masonic education cannot amount to anything unless there are provisions to educate Masonic educators. Where California fell down was in not having a traveling library system whereby libraries could be sent to each Lodge as has been so successful in Iowa, Washington and other States where the reading Mason and he who was to deliver an address before the Lodge could get the information necessary to make his speech authentic.

Our experience with the newly-made Mason in California has only emphasized the saying "Catch them young." We found them hungry for knowledge about Masonry. They want to know and this is the main idea of Masonic education, to supply the average Mason with knowledge about the institution of which he is a member and of which ordinary literature gives him no accurate information.

Thanks to Brother Robert I. Clegg I received at the same time as THE BUILDER a copy of "Proceedings of the Third Informal Conference of Masonic Librarians and Educators in May of this year at Milwaukee," and I would suggest it might be a good idea of reprinting it seriatim in that magazine. There is one idea which seemed to me of great value and that is to have the public library in each city carry a group of Masonic books.

There is always such a thing as "Grand Lodge politics" and while it is not possible sometimes, as we have found in California, to get traveling libraries going to each Lodge when asked, yet it would be easier in many instances to get the public library in the city or town to put in a few Masonic books. There is no need for the introduction of Masonic Education into the Lodge. It was there from the beginning. It is for the rank and file to demand their birthright, for the sacerdotal class in all ages and all bodies, even Grand Lodges, have always sought to keep the multitude in ignorance that their own schemes might be forwarded.

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